

**Idaho Fish and Game Commission  
Special Meeting -- April 28, 2006  
Boise, Idaho**

Present in the Director's Office: Director Steven Huffaker; Deputy Attorney General Dallas Burkhalter; Chief of Fisheries Virgil Moore; Anadromous Fish Manager Sharon Kiefer; Chief of Wildlife Jim Unsworth; State Fish Manager Steve Yundt; Fisheries Program Coordinator Fred Partridge; Executive Assistant Marilyn Whitney; and Doug Schleis with the *Wild Idaho News*.

A special meeting of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission was held by telephone conference. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Cameron Wheeler at 8:09 a.m. with Commissioners Alex Irby, Wayne Wright, and John Watts. Commissioner Tony McDermott joined the call at 8:11 a.m.

**RULES**

**Lake Pend Oreille Fish Rules**

Steve Yundt, State Fish Manager, provided the Commission with background on the rule change. The region has been working to develop an incentive program on Lake Pend Oreille to get people to harvest rainbow trout and lake trout. It requires anglers to turn in fish heads that may have pit tags. Currently, it is unlawful to have in possession a trout that doesn't have the head attached. The change before the Commission is to make it lawful to have lake and rainbow trout in possession in the field or in transit on Lake Pend Oreille with the head removed. This will make it legal for people to cut the heads off and put them in receptacles around the lake so they can be eligible for rewards.

06-26 Commissioner Watts moved and Commissioner McDermott seconded a motion **TO ADOPT AS TEMPORARY RULES STAFF RECOMMENDATION TO ADD A SPECIAL RULE THAT IT IS LAWFUL TO HAVE LAKE TROUT AND RAINBOW TROUT IN POSSESSION IN THE FIELD OR IN TRANSIT WITH THE HEAD REMOVED; TAILS MUST REMAIN ATTACHED.** The motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Mr. Yundt, reported that the Department is bringing forth some additional recommendations for changes on Lake Pend Oreille, but those recommendations are going through the full public input process. Staff will bring those to the Commission at the May meeting in Coeur d'Alene.

**Chinook Salmon Run Update**

Sharon Kiefer, Anadromous Fish Manager, updated the Commission on the spring salmon run. Ms. Kiefer earlier provided Commissioners with a graph of Spring Chinook counts at Bonneville Dam (Appendix 39, Exhibit 45). Initiation of the run at Bonneville Dam is even later than 2005, which was a late run. This run includes both Snake River

spring and summer Chinook and occurs at Bonneville now through June 13. The run to date is just under 2,000 adults. Late-timed runs typically see 50 percent passage by May 5. The recent 10-year average runs had 50 percent passage by April 27. The cumulative count to date in 2006 is the lowest in the 1970 -2005 dataset. To achieve 50 percent of the pre-season forecast of 88,000 adults at the mouth of the Columbia River by May 5, the run size at Bonneville Dam would have to be 4,000 fish per day every day up until May 5. Currently, the daily run size has been less than 500 per day. Less than a handful of spring Chinook have arrived in the Snake River. Last year as of April 26 at Ice Harbor, the run was 446 (and that was a late run). This year the count is 3. Run size is so low that it is unclear when 50 percent passage at Bonneville will occur. That is typically when a run size forecast can be made with confidence.

The low run size at Bonneville Dam to date somewhat conflicts with the moderate handle rate at downriver sport fisheries. Some still have some hope that the run will not be as low as suggested by current passage. It is clear that the pre-season forecast will not be achieved at the river mouth. It is also very likely that the Lower Granite Dam forecast of 22,000 spring and summer Chinook adults will not be achieved.

There are not enough fish at Bonneville Dam to update the forecast at this time. Idaho Staff believes the run will range from 10,000 (1995 situation) to about 50,000 abundance. In past years with a similar run size at Bonneville, Idaho has not been able to implement salmon seasons. Idaho staff continues to review Snake River specific information such as pit tags and are working with downriver and tribal staffs to continue to assess the run. Staff will update the Commission at the May meeting unless there is reason to suggest fishery opportunity prior to that date.

Biologists knew that smolts that went to the ocean in 2004 would not fare well based on sea surface temperature measurements and ocean transects. At that time, the ocean was not in a good place relative to productivity. There were also reports of large scale northern migrations of hake, sardines, and anchovies due to the shift in ocean temperatures. What is less known is the impact of sea lions below Bonneville as those populations continue to increase. We do not know if there is an increasing proportion of the run taken by sea lions. Staff had previously reported to the Commission that jack counts last year were low. A very low productivity situation in ocean may result in a lower adult per jack scale than normal. The out-migration in 2004 and 2005 relative to hydropower protections resulted in mixed message. For the 2005 smolt migration, the ocean temperature measurements and fish transects showed it was virtually a desert when smolts got to the ocean. Ocean conditions turned around over the summer of 2005, we still may be looking at two very bad years. We are currently in a wait and see mode.

The Director commented that the current situation is reminiscent of the late 80s and early 90s, and the Department needs to remind people of that. We will implement salmon seasons if that is biologically warranted, but it will have to be on short notice.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 a.m.